

*LAZI (LAB RTSE) CONSTRUCTION IN KARMATANG
(SKAR MA THANG) VILLAGE*

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ABSTRACT

The construction of a new *lazi (lab rtse)* in Karmatang (Skar ma thang) is described, with fourteen photographs illustrating the process.

KEY WORDS

Lab rtse, Skar ma thang, Tibetan, Qinghai, Amdo, *lazi*

Tsemdo (Tshe mdo) took these photos in his home village of Karmatang¹ (Skar ma thang), Xinjie² 新街 Township, Trika (Khri ka, Guide 贵德) County, Mtsolo (Mtsho lho, Hainan 海南) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsongon (Mtsho sgnon, Qinghai 青海) Province on 15 July 2007. The photos show the process of constructing a new *lazi* (*lab rtse*).

Lazi are religious structures found throughout Tibetan and adjacent areas that embody local mountain deities, in this case Amny Wawo (A myes Bal bo—the mountain at right in Figure One). Images of Amny Machen (A myes Rma chen—Figure Two) and Amny Dakar (A myes Brag dkar—Figure Three) were also placed in the *lazi*. Amny Machen is often represented as the leader of local deities (*zhidak*, *gzhi bdag*) in Amdo and thus his image was also needed for the Karmatang *lazi*.

Amny Wawo brings good fortune and bountiful harvests, and protects the village. The *lazi* is his stockpile of weapons for fending off evils. Many representations of rifles, spears, arrows (Figure Four), and knives are built into a new *lazi*, which is also considered to be the seat of the deity. Finally, *lazi* are also thought to be memorials to the bravery of past heroes.

The first step in building a *lazi* is for a lama to choose a correct location, which is usually a high place such as a mountain summit or ridge, although a *lazi* may be located at a mountain base. Ati Tenpa Gyatso (A this bstan pa rgya mthso), the incarnate lama of nearby Ati (A this) Monastery, chose the location for this *lazi* based on geomantic analysis of local land formations.

Once a suitable location was chosen, Karmatang

¹ Tibetan is written phonetically, followed by Wiley transliteration at first usage. For Chinese terms, *pinyin* 拼音 is given with Chinese characters accompanying first usage.

² The township lacks a commonly used Tibetan name.

villagers gathered the materials necessary for construction, including representations of rifles, knives, and swords; coral, turquoise, gold, silver, coins; and so on. The arrows included real hunting arrows as well as large, straight poles that had been fashioned into massive arrow forms. Most arrows depicted here were sourced from Xining 西宁 lumber yards and then transported to Karmatang. The central pole or *shokshang* (*srog shing*—literally, 'life-wood'—see Figure Five) was taken from Chamo Yangdzong (Khra mo gyang rdzong) Valley near Mt. Amny Dakar. The conifer trees and bushes used during construction (figures Six and Seven) were sourced from three valleys, which are locally known as Dzong sum (Rdzong gsum—'Three Valleys'). These valleys are named Chamo Yangdzong (Khra mo yang rdzong—'Dappled Valley'), Dakmodzong (Stag mo rdzong—'Tigress Valley'), and Ngonmodzong (Sngon mo rdzong—'Blue Valley').

When these materials were prepared, Ati Monastery monks purified the materials (Figure Eight) by chanting scriptures for three days. Meanwhile, villagers built the *lazi* foundation by leveling the ground and building a rectangular concrete base four meters square. A hole about one and a half meters square was put in the center where objects were buried (figures Nine to Eleven). When the foundation was complete, villagers began the *lazi* ritual depicted in these images, guided by the monks (figures Twelve to Fourteen).

This *lazi* is located on a southeast-facing ridge of Mount Amny Dakar. Prior to the building of this *lazi*, a village shrine served the purpose of the *lazi*. On the anniversary of the construction of this *lazi*, villagers add new hunting arrows, tree branches, and wool string. The locals added additional new arrows and tree braches to the *lazi* on the thirteenth day of the sixth lunar month in 2008, the first anniversary of the *lazi's* construction. When villagers need a blessing or a favor from the local deity,

they visit the *lazi* where they leave offerings of incense and wheat flour in order to bring good luck for such things as long trips and business transactions, to prevent natural disasters, and so on. Before the *lazi* was constructed, people went to the Karmatang Village shrine or to high places around the village (such as Amny Wawo, or other hillsides) marked with prayer flags and wind horses and performed similar activities. People make offerings on the first and/ or the fifteenth days of each lunar month.

The Karmatang *lazi* was built based on the recommendation of a villager who was consulted by an overseas Tibetan benefactor, a Karmatang native now residing in New York City. He contributed 10,000 RMB to construct the *lazi* in the hope of helping villagers.

Figure One: Karmatang Village before the *lazi* ritual. The *lazi*, after completion, was located on the ridge to the far right. Amny Wawo is the high, dome-shaped mountain on the right.

Figure Two: Amny Machen as depicted in a *tangka* (*thangka*) in a village home.

Figure Three: Amny Dakar depicted in a mural in the shrine of neighboring Ru jyi (Rol skye) Village.

Figure Four: Arrows are made and painted before *lazi* construction. Village leaders bought the materials in Xining and village men made the arrows. Each household provided fifty RMB to purchase materials.

Figure Five: The lama and the villagers set up the *shokshang*.

Figure Six: Villagers load a conifer tree onto a tractor trailer. The conifer was tied to the *shokshang*. Villagers

were chosen for this task on the basis of having such auspicious religious names as Tsering Tashi (Tshe ring Bkra shis, literally, 'longevity auspiciousness') and if they were considered morally upright and virtuous. They traveled twenty kilometers by tractor to collect the necessary materials.

Figure Seven: The conifer tree is tied to the *shokshang*. Wool strings are tied among the conifer's leaves.

Figure Eight: The day before the *lazi* ritual, such materials as dough effigies called *torma* (*gtor ma*), *wonba* (*bum pa*—a vase filled with wheat, beans, honey, and butter), and scripture-inscribed wood blocks were prepared.

Figure Nine: The lama and his student measure where the *shokshang* should be placed.

Figure Ten: The monks chant after the *wonba* is placed in the *lazi* base.

Figure Eleven: The monks cover the *wonba* with soil. Next, the *shokshang* is set upright above where the *wonba* is buried. The monk holds silk (*rgya sras za 'og*) that will be placed over the *wonba*.

Figure Twelve: The longest arrow is inserted into the *lazi* first and the shortest one last.

Figure Thirteen: Village children tie white wool string, symbolizing auspiciousness, around the *lazi shokshang* to stabilize it and the arrows.

Figure Fourteen: Rain fell after the *lazi* was constructed. People shouted, "*Lha rgyal lo!* Victory to the gods!", scattered wind horses (*rlung rta*), and left.























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